

ROD BUILDING

BY LARRY LEE

Rod Building 104— Blank Alignment for Reel Seat and Guides

In previous articles, we discussed the “why” of building your own rod, types of blanks, and actions. Now we are ready to focus on the actual details of rod building.

For those who are not really interested in building a rod, read on! The articles can still be extremely useful in selecting ready-built rods. These articles will explain what makes rods work the way they do (operator error excluded) and the individual parts that went into your rod. You will also gain knowledge in performance characteristics of rods, types of components available, and costs.

There are a lot of details to cover because there are many things that the builder has control over in regards to performance. We will try to keep the details as clear as possible, but because of the level of detail required, and the limited space available, it may take several articles to cover a single topic clearly. So, here we go...

Finding the Spine (alias the Spline)

After you have selected a blank, it is important to align your blank for proper reel seat and guide positioning. This process is analogous to purchasing new tires for your car. When the tires are put on the car, they must be balanced correctly for optimum performance and wear. So with fly rods, for optimum performance, the reel seat and guides must be fit to the proper side or parallel axis of each blank segment. If the reel seat and the guides are placed at random rather than the spine, the rod will not work well.

Around the circumference of each blank segment, there is a line that runs along the axis of the segment. This “line” is the least bendable spot. When rod blanks are made, each has a stronger side that is called the spine or “spline”. It is the “backbone” of the segment and must be located for proper

reel/guide placement.

In some cases, the effective spine will be very easy to find and in other cases it will be almost non-detectable. In a few cases there will be two effective spines, with one more prominent and maybe even 180° opposite of the other. This spine is a result of blank construction deviations.

In order to locate the spine, first wrap some masking tape around each blank segment near the center. Have a pen available to mark the spine location on this tape when you have found it.

Now hold the blank segment at about a 45° angle with the butt end resting on a hard, smooth surface. With either your right or left palm supporting the top of the segment, use the other hand to press down on the center of the blank (bending it slightly and rolling it back and forth). While doing this, you will notice a point where the blank seems to jump and you will notice an increased stiff resistance in the hand pushing down. This point on the blank axis is the effective spline. You will need to mark the point on the masking tape with the pen to indicate the spine. Continue the procedure of locating and marking the spine on the remaining segments. In the next rod-building article, we will discuss positioning of the reel seat and guides based on the spine location.

Questions or suggestions?

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